

# KISHINEV



AN ORIGINAL PLAY BY MAX SPARTAN

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## Act One — Scene One:

*(YAAKOV ADLER and DOVID LEVINSKY sit on an elevated platform, dressed in black formal suits and top hats and wearing red sashes. These sashes read ZION. Behind them hangs a banner, and this reads KISHINEV ZIONIST ORGANIZATION. A DRONE of Yiddish can be heard. Yaakov and Dovid both maintain an expression of supreme boredom. Yaakov pulls a flask from his pocket, sips, and passes it to Dovid, who likewise sips.)*

YAAKOV: Remarkable, Dovid.

DOVID: Yes, Yaakov?

YAAKOV: The long-windedness.

DOVID: Yes.

YAAKOV: Speeches.

DOVID: Yes.

YAAKOV: This is Zionism?

DOVID: What else?

YAAKOV: From the dour expressions, I would guess something else.

DOVID: Nu?

YAAKOV: From this endless drone of incomprehensible Yiddish — something else.

DOVID: Nu?

YAAKOV: I would guess Hasidism.

DOVID: Ah. And who would know better?

YAAKOV: Anyone here could tell you. Half this room are ex-Hasids. It's not such a long journey.

DOVID: Journey?

YAAKOV: From Hasidism to Zionism. I grew up with many of these men, and as boys we gathered around the table of our Rebbeh.

DOVID: The Rebbeh! Ah! The miracle worker.

YAAKOV: Miracle worker? Yes. If he was sober, it was a miracle. If he did not rob his Hasidim blind, it was a miracle. If he kept his hands off his Hasids' wives, it was another miracle. He was capable of a thousand such miracles per day.

DOVID: A great man!

YAAKOV: Great, yes. Once we caught him eating pork.

DOVID: No!

YAAKOV: He waved his hand over it and declared: “now it’s kosher!” Another miracle.

DOVID: Miracles!

*(A MASSIVE HASID enters with a CHILD on his back. He stretches his hands out, pointing:)*

MASSIVE HASID: Look around you, Liebele! Miracles hang from the chandelier and fall beneath the tables here!

*(Behind him, a crowd of HASIDIM enters, carrying a long table set for a feast. They set the table down and gather around it, excitedly. One points:)*

HASID: The Rebbeh!

*(A KLEZMER BAND enters playing a HASIDIC MELODY. The band consists of seven members, each wearing a red coat bound by a gold sash, each has a red fez banded with gold. They play, respectively: a tam drum, a tin whistle, three play fiddles, and one has a pair of cymbals. They cross the stage and take seats stage right. They will remain here throughout the play, performing music appropriate to the scene.)*

*Behind them enters THE REBBEH with his assistant, REB YOSSELE. The Rebbeh is an old man with a long gray beard and long gray sidelocks. Reb Yossele is young, with a tightly trimmed beard and thick round glasses. He supports the Rebbeh on one arm, leading him to the table. The Hasidim make room for the Rebbeh.*

*The Rebbeh takes his place at the center of the table. Food is placed before him, and he passes his hand over it, muttering a PRAYER. The Hasidim call out OIMEN!, and seize the food. The child watches this, amazed.)*

CHILD: Why do we eat the Rebbeh’s food?

MASSIVE HASID: When the Rebbeh eats, he elevates the soul of the food. When we eat the food, we too are elevated.

YAAKOV: The Hasidim believe they will return after death.

DOVID: Return as what?

YAAKOV: If they’re good, as Jews. As a reward.

DOVID: And if they’re bad?

YAAKOV: As Jews. But as a punishment, they won’t have a Rebbeh.

DOVID: You must have been very bad in your previous life, Yaakov.

YAAKOV: Indeed. I have neither a Rebbeh nor a God. Who do I turn to when I'm in distress?

*(At this moment, REB KITZIS enters. He seems exhausted, on the verge of tears. He rushes over to the Rebbeh's table, and cries out:)*

REB KITZIS: The baby, Rebbeh!

*(He collapses. The other Hasidim help him to his feet, and the Rebbeh takes his hand from across the table. Reb Yossele leans over to the Rebbeh, whispers in his ear.)*

REB YOSSELE: This is Reb Kitzis. His daughter is dying of fever.

REBBEH: The Angel of Death approaches your daughter, Reb Kitzis?

REB KITZIS: He is at her cradle. She cannot breathe.

REBBEH: We must act quickly. Bring me the *Sefirah Or*, Reb Yossele.

*(Reb Yossele crosses to the back of the stage, produces a thick book. He brings it to the Rebbeh, places it before him. The Rebbeh opens it, presses his finger down onto a page.)*

REBBEH: We will change her name, Reb Kitzis, and confound the Angel of Death. God has directed my hand in this book, and has selected a new name for your daughter. *(Looking down at book, then faltering.)* The name the Master of the Universe has selected is . . . Lilith.

REB KITZIS: Lilith?

REBBEH: God does not play tricks, Reb Kitzis. If He has selected this name, there must be a reason. Go home and put together a minyan of ten men. Change her name, and she shall live. Blessed be the will of the Almighty.

HASIDIM: Blessed is the wisdom of the Rebbeh.

*(Reb Kitzis exits, and ten Hasidim follow him. The remainder now exits, carrying the table with them, and Reb Yossele helps the Rebbeh exit.)*

YAAKOV: Tell me, Dovid. When you despair, do you turn to Zionism? Is Zionism better than God?

DOVID: Well, Yaakov. Perhaps there is no God, but we know there is Zionism.

YAAKOV: An excellent point. You argue so well, you could have been a rabbinical student.

DOVID: This from the rabbinical student!

YAAKOV: Ah, but I couldn't argue, Dovid. I could never make my own points, only mock those points others made. Perhaps it was inevitable I became a Zionist, as I mocked everything: God, the Rebbeh, mysticism, superstition.

DOVID: You would dare to mock superstition?

YAAKOV: Nu, angels? Devils? It all seemed silly to me. Lilith?

DOVID: Lilith!

YAAKOV: What they said about Lilith, it interested me.

DOVID: What did they say?

*(The ten Hasidim now enter stage center, bringing a cradle with them. Reb Kitzis enters, stands above the cradle, immersed in prayer, swaying gently in place. In the meanwhile, the ten Hasidim take up an energetic conversation:)*

HASID ONE: Lilith!

HASID TWO: It is a terrible irony!

HASID THREE: In the Torah there are two stories of creation.

ALL: Yes!

HASID THREE: In the first, man and women are created side by side!

ALL: Yes!

HASID THREE: In the second, woman is created from man's rib.

HASID ONE: The Torah does not contradict itself.

ALL: No!

HASID ONE: Therefore, Adam had two wives.

ALL: Yes!

HASID ONE: And the first was Lilith.

YAAKOV: Lilith, Adam's first wife, who was kicked out of paradise for disobeying her husband.

DOVID: She couldn't have been happy with that.

YAAKOV: She wasn't.

HASID TWO: Lilith, the Mother of Demons. Her children are the source of mischief throughout the world!

HASID THREE: She is jealous of the children of Adam and Eve, and will rob infants from the cradles if she can!

HASID FOUR: To make her demon children, she creeps into the room of scholars at night and steals their seed.

YAAKOV: *(Repeating, with emphasis.)* To make her demon children, she creeps into the room of scholars at night and steals their seed.

DOVID: This is what they say?

YAAKOV: Yes. So you can see, hearing this about Lilith, she did not seem so evil to me.

DOVID: Nu?

YAAKOV: I used to leave my door open for her at night, hoping she would steal my seed. But I guess I wasn't scholar enough.

HASID FOUR: The terrible irony! Reb Kitzis must name his daughter after the Mother of Demons to save her life!

*(Coughing comes from the cradle. Reb Kitzis looks up, tearful.)*

REB KITZIS: My daughter breathes again! Her fever is breaking!

HASIDIM: Blessed is the wisdom of the Rebbeh!



## Act One — Scene Two:

*(Again the drone of Yiddish. Again, Yaakov Adler and Dovid Levinsky listen, slumped over, heads in hands. Yaakov checks his pocket watch.)*

YAAKOV: It does not end! I've lost the thread of the speech; what is he talking about?

DOVID: Education.

YAAKOV: Education?

DOVID: Establishing schools to teach Hebrew as a spoken language. Schools that teach agriculture, as we will have to farm in Zion. Schools in military and tactics, as when the Jews have a homeland they will have to defend it.

YAAKOV: Ah, I see. I must have dozed off when I heard the word "education."

DOVID: You? But you're a learned man, Yaakov.

YAAKOV: I've learned how to sleep through lectures, yes. Do you know, I very nearly fell asleep the first day I started at the kheyder, during my first lesson in Hebrew?

DOVID: What prevented you?

YAAKOV: It was a tradition in my shtetl to hang pocketwatches from the vest of the new student. I couldn't even study my aleph-beys; all I heard was tick tick ticking.

DOVID: Why pocketwatches?

YAAKOV: I don't know, Dovid. Some obscure symbolism, or tradition instituted by the Rebbeh. It didn't seem important enough.

DOVID: Important enough?

YAAKOV: To wake up to learn.

*(A HASIDIC WOMAN enters, with two OTHERS. She gestures stage center, calling out joyously: All three carry wicker baskets filled with nuts, dates and candy.)*

WOMAN ONE: Such a ceremony! My boy is going to begin his religious education!

*(Enter Reb Kitzis with a chair. He sits, and LILITH (age three) enters and takes her place on his lap. A HASIDIC BOY enters, his clothes hung with pocketwatches, and stands next to Reb Kitzis. The boy's BROTHER and FATHER enter, watching from the sides earnestly.)*

REB KITZIS: Little boy, what are your father and mother doing?

BOY: *(Sing-songy.)* They are having a beautiful celebration.

REB KITZIS: Why? Because you are beginning to study *humash*?



BOY: Yes, Reb Kitzis.

WOMAN TWO: I can't help but cry.

WOMAN THREE: Poor Reb Kitzis!

WOMAN ONE: Such a genius, and his mind is going to waste!

WOMAN TWO: He teaches children their Aleph-beys? He should be teaching in a Rabbinic school!

WOMAN THREE: The story is so sad! His heart was broken by the death of his wife, and he still grieves for her!

WOMAN ONE: And because he grieves, he can't bear to do anything but teach children.

*(The boy's brother steps forward and speaks, also sing-songy:)*

BROTHER: You shall have a wife with twelve curls, one for each of the tribes of Israel, and she will be a blessing to you.

*(The women step out from forward and throw candy and nuts on the boy, and all call out MAZEL TOV! Just as quickly, the women retire back behind the door, back into gossiping.)*

REB KITZIS: What are you holding in your hand?

BOY: A *humash*, Reb Kitzis.

REB KITZIS: That is a funny word, *humash*. What does it mean?

BOY: It means five, Reb Kitzis.

REB KITZIS: Five? Five of what? Five donkeys, five monkeys, five golden rings?

LILITH: *(Laughing.)* No!

BOY: No. It is the five books of Moses. It is the Holy Torah.

REB KITZIS: Can you name the five books?

LILITH: Bereshith, Shemoth, B'midbar, Vayikroh. . .

REB KITZIS: Shh, Lilith. Let the boy answer. *(To the boy.)* It seems you will have to answer my questions before my daughter does. And I warn you: she is fast.

BOY: Yes, Reb Kitzis. Bereshith, Shemoth . . .

WOMAN ONE: Do you see his daughter? She is answering the questions!

WOMAN TWO: He goes nowhere without his daughter, she even comes with him to kheyder. If he leaves her, she screams and cries.

WOMAN THREE: Ah, the poor girl. She has no mother, so she clings twice as hard to her father.

WOMAN ONE: Look, she knows Torah! The little girl knows Torah!

WOMAN TWO: *(Repeating.)* She even comes with him to kheyder.

*(A GROUP OF CHILDREN now enters, crossing the stage, singing a wordless melody called SHIR HASHIRIM. Reb Kitzis rises and takes his daughter's hand, then crosses to the back of the line and lifts a SMALL CHILD, carrying him in his arms. The child bursts into tears.)*

WOMAN TWO: She walks with him every morning.

*(With that, the boy and his relatives exit, leaving a bare stage. The children cross it with Reb Kitzis.)*

REB KITZIS: Shh, little Liebele. Every day I carry you to kheyder, and every day you cry. People will think I am a bad teacher.

YAAKOV: My only memories of the kheyder were of walking back and forth, to and from. Our teacher would walk us.

DOVID: What do you remember?

YAAKOV: Stories.

DOVID: What sort of stories?

YAAKOV: Legends. Ghost stories. Miracle stories about our Rebbeh. For Hasidic children, the world is a place of wonders.

*(The boys at the front of the line talk among themselves excitedly. One of these boys is YITZIK MEYER, and he has a long scar along his cheek.)*

BOY 2: When the messiah comes, all the Jewish dead will come back to life.

BOY 3: Out of their graves?

BOY 2: Tunnels will open up in the ground, and they will walk under the earth to Jerusalem.

BOY 3: How will we know when the messiah is going to come?

YITZIK: He will come after a great disaster. Just when it seems things can't get worse for the Jews, he will come.

*(Reb Kitzis stops in place, puzzled.)*

REB KITZIS: What is this? There are fish all over the street!

*(A STOREKEEPER steps out, holding a basket. He sees the children and calls to them.)*

STOREKEEPER: A penny for every fish brought to me, children! A penny for every fish!

*(The children scurry about, collecting fish and putting them in the storekeeper's basket. Reb Kitzis crosses to him.)*

REB KITZIS: Scholem aleikhem, Reb Hirschman. What has happened to your fish?

STOREKEEPER: Aleikhem scholem, Reb Kitzis. My fish were overturned in the streets.

REB KITZIS: Tsk. Who would do such a thing?

STOREKEEPER: A non-Jew, who else? He came into my store with his two sons and accused me of cheating him.

REB KITZIS: You should thank the Master of the Universe he did not burn your store, Reb Hirschman.

STOREKEEPER: Nu, it is very difficult to be a Jew, Reb Kitzis.

REB KITZIS: True. But it is also very good to be a Jew. *(Calling out.)* Children, come to kheyder now!

*(The children bring in a long table, and sit at it. Reb Kitzis takes off his overcoat, hangs it up, and then produces a long wooden switch he gives to Lilith.)*

REB KITZIS: You know what to do with this?

LILITH: Yes, tate.

REB KITZIS: What?

LILITH: I should walk around the kheyder and make sure children pay attention.

REB KITZIS: And if they don't?

LILITH: I should hit them with the stick.

REB KITZIS: Good girl.

*(Reb Kitzis seats himself at the long table, and open a book. All the children do likewise.)*

REB KITZIS: Vayikroh, perek aleph.

*(The boys chant in Hebrew earnestly, a cacophony as each wrestle with the text at his own rate. Lilith stands behind Yitzik, listening. Suddenly, she hits him, and he SHOUTS. The*

*room falls silent, as everyone turns to look.)*

YITZIK: Why did you hit me?

LILITH: You read wrong.

YITZIK: How could you know? You can't read! *(To Reb Kitzis.)* She can't read, she couldn't know!

REB KITZIS: Why do you think he misread, Lilith?

LILITH: Have him read again. He always repeats the same mistake.

REB KITZIS: Read again, Yitzik.

*(Yitzik CHANTS, and then looks up.)*

REB KITZIS: You read wrong.

*(He crosses to Lilith, places a book in front of her.)*

REB KITZIS: Lilith, will you read from the top of the page?

*(Lilith chants quickly, then looks up.)*

REB KITZIS: How do you know how to chant Torah, Lilith?

LILITH: You teach me.

REB KITZIS: I teach you?

LILITH: I dream that you teach me.

REB KITZIS: You dream . . .? Tell me about your dreams.

LILITH: I dream we are in the kheyder at night, and you show me how to read. And I dream that little blond boys come in to disturb us, and you throw them out.

REB KITZIS: Little blond boys?

LILITH: With blue eyes. If you don't scare them away, they steal books or break things.

REB KITZIS: You dream of blond boys. Is this all?

LILITH: No. Sometimes I dream of pigs.

REB KITZIS: Tell me.

LILITH: I dream of our room at night, and I dream mama is alive, but she is sick.

*(The children rise and take out the table. Others bring in a desk, where Reb Kitzis sits, reading a newspaper. The children exit. This happens as Lilith continues telling her story:)*

LILITH: I dream she has a fever, and lies in bed all day. And I dream you sit and study, and always look unhappy. Is there something wrong, Tate?

REB KITZIS: There is, Lilith. There is much evil in this world. I try and console myself with the study of Talmud, but it is no consolation. I read that if an unborn child is threatening the life of the mother, it must be cut to pieces in the womb to save her. And then I open the paper, and I see this:

*(Reb Kitzis raises the paper, the Bessarabetz. The cover bears a print of Simon of Trent being tortured by Jews.)*

LILITH: Tate?

REB KITZIS: This is Simon of Trent, Lilith. The non-Jews say we murdered him, and they have made him a Saint. The Gentiles say Jews take the blood of their babies to use in our Passover matzo. They print it in the paper, to make us hated. Pogroms are made from such lies.

LILITH: *(Turning away.)* And then, in the bedroom, I hear squealing.

*(SQUEALS come from offstage. Reb Kitzis rises, alarmed.)*

REB KITZIS: PIGS! There are pigs in mama's bedroom!

LILITH: And I dream you take a broom, and run to the bedroom. And I dream there are pigs around mama's bed, and they have their feet up on her bed, and they bite at her.

*(Lilith begins to weep. As she does so, the boys replace Reb Kitzis' desk with the table, and all sit again. Reb Kitzis pulls his daughter to him, kissing her and embracing her.)*

LILITH: Tate, was mama killed by pigs?

REB KITZIS: Your mama died in childbirth, Lilith. There were no pigs.

LILITH: What is a pogrom?

REB KITZIS: God forbid you should ever know that word, Lilith. *(To the children.)* God forbid any of you should know. It is the worst thing possible.

## Act One — Scene Three:

*(The drone of Yiddish. Yaakov again takes out his flask, takes a sip. He passes it to Dovid, who raises a hand: enough.)*

YAAKOV: How blessed is Mordechai, how wicked is Haman.

DOVID: What?

YAAKOV: Can you tell the difference?

DOVID: Between “how blessed is Mordechai” and “how wicked is Haman?”

YAAKOV: Yes.

DOVID: Yes.

YAAKOV: Then you are not drunk enough.

DOVID: It is not the Purim holiday, Yaakov.

YAAKOV: How do you know? We’ve been here a long time.

DOVID: Perhaps it is Purim. *(He takes the flask, sips.)*

YAAKOV: My father, rest his soul, took the commandment to get drunk on Purim very seriously.

DOVID: Oh?

YAAKOV: He once got so drunk, he stabbed our Rebbeh. He died.

DOVID: No!

YAAKOV: Yes. All the community was horrified, and they began to weep and pray, begging the Master of the Universe to return our Rebbeh to us.

DOVID: Another miracle?

YAAKOV: The most amazing yet! The Rebbeh stirred, and came back from the dead!

DOVID: Was he angry with your father?

YAAKOV: Angry? No . . .

DOVID: But he never invited your father to his house for Purim again, did he?

YAAKOV: You’ve heard this joke.

DOVID: When I heard it, it was the Rebbeh who killed a man.

YAAKOV: On Purim, our Rebbeh was not sober enough to stab anyone. Ah, I miss those carnivals. The girls would perform a show.

DOVID: A purim-shpiel. Yes. We had those too. But girls did not perform them. Our rabbi usually performed them.

YAAKOV: The rabbi? When you've been drinking, who wants to look at the rabbi?

*(HASIDIM enter, carrying chairs, walking in a single-file line. At the head of the line is the Rebbeh, helped to walk by Reb Kitzis. Reb Yossele walks behind them, carrying an ornate and gilded chair for the Rebbeh and a white box. They sit the chairs down, sit, with Reb Kitzis and Reb Yossele flanking the Rebbeh. The band plays an ORIENTAL THEME.)*

REBBEH: So she learns Torah in her sleep.

REB KITZIS: Yes, and dreams of pigs.

REBBEH: Is there significance to the pigs?

REB KITZIS: I believe there is. I have heard that after a pogrom, pigs run wild in the streets and devour the dead.

REBBEH: I have also heard such a thing. And I have already heard about your daughter. She remembers everything, does she not?

REB KITZIS: Anything she is told, anything she reads, she can recite back.

REBBEH: Then I think there is meaning in her dreams. It is true, is it not, that you are descended from a disciple of the founder of Hasidism.

REB KITZIS: Yes. I am the grandson of Wolf Kitzis, who was one of the Ba'al Shem Tov's first disciples.

REBBEH: You know that he was a friend with my grandfather, Jacob Joseph.

REB KITZIS: Yes.

REBBEH: When I was a boy, my grandfather used to tell me that the world is so wicked it would be destroyed, but there are 36 saints on whose account the world is saved. Have you heard these stories?

REB KITZIS: Yes. They keep their identities a secret, and do acts of justice wherever they travel.

REBBEH: Jacob Joseph believed your grandfather, Wolf Kitzis, was one of the 36 secret saints.

REB KITZIS: The memory of my grandfather is a blessing to all of us.



REBBEH: And I sometimes suspect you may also be a secret saint.

REB KITZIS: If I am, it is also a secret from me.

REBBEH: Still, there may be great meaning in your daughter's dreams. Those who almost die sometimes see things nobody else can. Is this your daughter now?

*(LILITH (age seven) and THREE HASIDIC GIRLS run out bearing cups and goblets of wine. They hand them to the Hasidim, and pour glasses. All the girls are dressed in costumes as members of a Persian royal house, with Lilith's costume the most ornate. She gives the Rebbeh a glass and wine.)*

REBBEH: Or is it Vashti, the wife of the Persian king?

LILITH: His wife no more!

*(Lilith and the Hasidic girls throw their hands over their eyes, WEEPING DRAMATICALLY.)*

REBBEH: What has happened?

LILITH: I have been cast out of my kingdom!

HASIDIC GIRL 1: On this day!

HASIDIC GIRL 2: Because of wine!

HASIDIC GIRL 3: We lost our home!

REBBEH: Was the king angry with you, Vashti?

LILITH: He asked me to do something I would not do.

REBBEH: What was that?

LILITH: Dance before his guests, and show them my beauty. I refused.

REBBEH: And he punished you.

LILITH: My loss was terrible. In Persia, I had everything my heart desired.

REBBEH: A good house?

LILITH: A palace, with a bedchamber as large as a mansion.

REBBEH: Jewelry?

LILITH: It filled a room, and took 20 men to move.

REBBEH: Beautiful clothes?

LILITH: Made from the finest silks by the finest tailors.

REBBEH: Perhaps, Queen Vashti, you can help settle an argument between Reb Yossele and me. I have a dress:

*(Reb Yossele opens the white box, produces a wedding dress. It is hung with silver coins. Reb Yossele lifts it so all can see.)*

REBBEH: I argue that no dress in Kishinev is prettier.

REB YOSSELE: I argue no dress in the world can equal it.

REBBEH: Nu, Queen Vashti. Who is more correct?

LILITH: You are both correct. It is the most beautiful dress I have ever seen.

REBBEH: It has a story. It belonged to my grandmother, who was from Yemen. She was married in it, and her daughter was, and whoever I shall marry will also wear it.

LILITH: That woman will be blessed, Rebbeh.

REBBEH: My Hasidim insist she must be a special woman.

HASID 1: The Rebbeh must marry a woman from a good family!

HASID 2: The Rebbeh must marry a woman of scrupulous character.

HASID 3: The Rebbeh must marry a woman of great beauty.

REBBEH: A woman like that, her price is above rubies, no? My Hasidim are so strict, I fear I will never marry!

LILITH: God will provide such a woman.

HASIDIC GIRLS: God will provide.

*(The Hasidim exit.)*

YAAKOV: *(Toasting.)* God will provide.

DOVID: What?

YAAKOV: Whatever you desire. What do you desire?

DOVID: An end to this speech.

YAAKOV: He does go on, doesn't he? What is he talking about now?

DOVID: Education.

YAAKOV: Still?

DOVID: He is now saying that no other people in history have given education the importance that Jews have.

*(As Dovid says this, the students bring in a table again. They take their places around it as Reb Kitzis enters and sits. Behind the children, Lilith walks with her switch in hand.)*

YAAKOV: Neither have any people in history given as many bruises.

*(Lilith strikes one of the children with her switch. He cries out in pain. The children pause in their studies for a moment to look, then return to their reading.)*

LILITH: Do not discuss secular subjects in class.

YAAKOV: The only reason I can read is because the Hebrew alphabet was beaten into my skin. I received blows for every letter. Aleph. *(Lilith strikes a child, who YELPS.)* Beys. *(Lilith strikes a second child, who SQUEALS.)* Gimel. *(Lilith strikes a third child, who HOLLERS. Lilith and the children pause now and look at Yaakov, who glances back at them.)* Etcetera. *(The children breathe a sigh of relief.)* It's education, yes — but is it good for the children?

*(Reb Kitzis rises, walking about the room absent-mindedly. He pauses at the window, then glances out. Suddenly he calls out:)*

REB KITZIS: Do I see correctly?

*(Reb Kitzis exits hurriedly. The students rise and cross to the window, crowding to look out. Lilith crosses her arms, annoyed, and crosses to Yitzik Meyer.)*

LILITH: When my father exits the kheyder, it does not mean you may go to the window.

YITZIK: Look out the window, Lilith. Do you see the man your father is talking to — the man in the red caftan?

LILITH: I have never met that man.

YITZIK: He is the Kishinev Gaon, and he is supposed to have the greatest Talmudic mind of all time. But he hates Hasidim, and that is why it is strange that he is talking to your father.

LILITH: Who is that with him? His son?

YITZIK: His name is Zalman Bar. He is an iluy.

LILITH: An iluy?

YITZIK: A genius, like his father. People say he can recite the entire Mishnah from memory.

LILITH: Who are the men who are with him?

YITZIK: Zalman Bar only thinks about Talmud, so sometimes he doesn't know where he puts his feet. A year ago he stepped into a river and almost drowned, so now he is never without people to watch him.

LILITH: *(Snorts.)* Some genius!

*(Reb Kitzis enters with the KISHINEV GAON, talking excitedly. ZALMAN BAR enters behind them, assisted by TWO COMPANIONS.)*

KISHINEV GAON: You understand my predicament, Reb Kitzis.

REB KITZIS: Of course.

KISHINEV GAON: Without the book, I am stuck.

REB KITZIS: I will gladly lend you the book.

KISHINEV GAON: Do not feel you must. But you are the only man I have found who has the book.

REB KITZIS: It was my grandfather's. But we are both Jews, and it is my pleasure to share it with you.

*(The Kishinev Gaon surveys the room. The Hasidic students stare back at him, amazed.)*

KISHINEV GAON: Your students debate Talmud?

REB KITZIS: Yes. *Bava Metzia*.

KISHINEV GAON: Even the very young?

REB KITZIS: Yes.

KISHINEV GAON: I have heard that you are a great scholar, Reb Kitzis. I cannot understand why you would be a heretic.

REB KITZIS: I do not believe Hasidism is heresy, rabbi. The book you want is in the back room; I will take you to it.

*(The exit together, leaving Zalman Bar and his two companions. The Hasidic children stare at Zalman Bar amazed. He pretends not to notice, turning his eyes heavenward. Lilith crosses to him.)*

LILITH: Why do you and your father wear red?

**ZALMAN BAR:** Because we are in the months Tammuz to Tishre. The Talmud says that during these months fruits are shapely and red-checked in the Holy Land. We wear red as a symbol of this.

**LILITH:** You wear different colors with every season?

**ZALMAN BAR:** Blue, white and green in the appropriate seasons. Why do Hasidim only wear black?

**LILITH:** Because we are always before God. We dress in our finest clothes when we appear before the Master of the Universe.

**ZALMAN BAR:** The Talmud says that a man wears black when he cannot control his evil influences, so that he can do what his heart desires and not be recognized. My father says this is why Hasidim wear black: because they are wicked.

**LILITH:** Your father is not correct. Hasidim live for righteousness, and there is none more righteous than our Rebbeh.

**ZALMAN BAR:** (*Angrily.*) If my father is not correct, then the Talmud is not correct! Rabbi Joshua said that a foolish Hasid is among those who bring destruction to the world, and Simon ben Lakish said if a foolish man is a Hasid do not dwell near him. (*Zalman Bar slaps his hand on the table, making a CRACKING noise and startling the Hasidic children.*) A foolish man can never be a scholar, and a scholar can never be a Hasid!

**BOY 1:** We are not foolish!

**BOY 2:** We study Talmud, just like you do!

**ZALMAN BAR:** I studied Talmud at half your age. (*Pointing to an open book on the table.*) I spent three weeks alone on this page, until I had mastered it. How well do you know it?

(*Lilith draws a pin from her clothes. She seizes the book and then presses the pin into it. Zalman Bar gasps, horrified.*)

**ZALMAN BAR:** You have just stuck a pin in the Talmud!

**LILITH:** Yitzik, tell me what word the pin passed through.

**YITZIK:** (*Taking the book.*) M'tzia.

**ZALMAN BAR:** You have damaged the Talmud!

**LILITH:** Lah.

**ZALMAN BAR:** What?

**LILITH:** Turn the page. The word "lah" will have a hole through it.

ZALMAN BAR: Ridiculous. You can't expect me to believe . . .

YITZIK: (*Turning the page.*) No, she is correct, Reb Zalman. The pin has passed through the word "lah."

ZALMAN BAR: So she has memorized the words on two pages . . .

LILITH: Car'khey.

YITZIK: (*Glancing at book.*) Correct again, daughter of Zion.

COMPANION 1: (*Bewildered.*) How is this possible? Girls are forbidden to read the Talmud!

COMPANION 2: (*Also bewildered.*) Where do you read Talmud, child?

LILITH: Over the shoulders of my father's students, when they study.

ZALMAN BAR: So Hasidim teach their children to lie!

LILITH: Hatam. Hah. Sumacus. D'ikah.

YITZIK: (*Flipping pages.*) Correct. Correct. Correct. Correct.

LILITH: D'amar. D'amri. Eliyahu. Yosei. I know them all, iluy.

YITZIK: She is correct every time, Reb Zalman.

ZALMAN BAR: So she memorizes, but she cannot understand. A little girl learning Talmud? Ridiculous! She does not understand.

LILITH: (*Furious.*) I understand, iluy; why wouldn't I? Rabbi Meir's wife Beruriah could give decisions on Jewish law — why can't I?

ZALMAN BAR: (*Also furious.*) Beruriah was an adulteress and committed suicide after shaming her husband! If you understood the Talmud, Hasid girl, you would never have put a pin in it!

*(Zalman Bar turns and storms away, marching directly into a wall. His companions assist him to his feet and they exit.)*

LILITH: (*Calling after him.*) I know the Talmud *better* than you do, iluy! I know the Talmud better than you ever could!

YITZIK: (*Laughs.*) Amazing, Lilith. Now he will tell his father that Hasidim teach their daughters to destroy the Talmud. You have not made a friend.

LILITH: I do not need a friend who cannot even find his way out of a door.

*(The Hasidic children remove the table and exit.)*

YAAKOV: Do you believe that some Jews hate each other?

DOVID: I believe it. They hate us.

YAAKOV: But we are worth hating. Zionism will be the end to Judaism.

DOVID: It will?

YAAKOV: Yes. Unless non-Jews put an end to it first.

*(Reb Kitzis enters, carrying a child in his arms. The child weeps. Lilith holds one of Reb Kitzis' hands, walking alongside. The other Hasidic children follow.)*

REB KITZIS: Shh, little Mordechai. Every year I have another child who weeps!

LILITH: Why do they hate Hasidim?

REB KITZIS: They call themselves “misnaggedim,” which means “opposers.” For them, who they are is defined by the fact that they are opposed to Hasidim. They think we are heretics, because we are different.

LILITH: Then I do not mind that I insulted Zalman Bar.

REB KITZIS: You should not insult anyone, Lilith. You should not seek to shame anyone with how great a memory you have.

LILITH: I'm sorry I stuck a pin in the Talmud, tate.

REB KITZIS: Run on ahead, Lilith. I am going to try and figure out why little Mordechai is crying. *(Lilith hurries ahead.)* Shh, Mordechai. What is the matter?

CHILD: I don't like to be carried.

*(Lilith eavesdrops on the older boys.)*

BOY 1: There are demons that live in the synagogues at night. They sleep on the benches and dance on the tables, and if you see one by accident they will tear your eyes out.

BOY 2: There are rabbis who go into the synagogue at night and capture these demons with silk rope, and they force the demons to tell their secrets.

BOY 3: Sometimes the rabbis fall asleep, and then Lilith comes to them at night and does terrible things to them

YITZIK: Lilith, mother of demons. *(To Lilith.)* I wonder what Zalman Bar would say if he knew that you shared her name.

LILITH: I have seen her.



YITZIK: You have seen the mother of demons?

LILITH: Yes. In the synagogue.

*(Hasids enter carrying benches and the Torah ark. The Hasidic boys move aside and watch from the edges of the stage as this makeshift synagogue fills up with Hasidim. One begins to chant, the others drape themselves in prayer shawls and bob in place. Reb Kitzis joins them in prayer, and Lilith sits by his side.)*

*Now a WOMAN enters, dressed in 1900-era fashionable women's clothes. She crosses the stage, watching Lilith, who turns and looks at her as well. Eventually she crosses to Lilith.)*

LILITH: Adult women are not allowed in this part of the synagogue.

WOMAN: Why not?

LILITH: The men might be distracted from their prayers.

WOMAN: I am not distracting anyone. They don't even see me. *(She sits, puts her arm around Lilith.)* I have heard that you remember everything you read. Is this true?

LILITH: Yes.

WOMAN: Have you ever read a book that tells the name of angels.

LILITH: Yes.

WOMAN: Then you can help me. Do you see that man at the wall?

*(She gestures to a Hasid seated against the backstage wall, near a door.)*

LILITH: Yes.

WOMAN: Do you know who he is?

LILITH: No. He comes before anyone else does and leaves after they do. He does not speak to anyone.

WOMAN: Come with me.

*(The woman leads Lilith to the Hasid. The synagogue falls silent, and the movement of the worshippers slows.)*

WOMAN: *(To Hasid.)* Stand up please. *(He does so.)* Show us your arms, please.

*(The Hasid does so, revealing that his arms are covered in ornate Hebrew script.)*

LILITH: What are those markings?

WOMAN: They cover his body. They are passages of Torah. This is the angel who guards the synagogue. *(To Hasid.)* Thank you, you may sit down. *(The Hasid sits.)* Can you guess what his name might be?

LILITH: There are many angels who guard synagogues. There are hundreds of names.

WOMAN: Help me guess. It is like a game.

LILITH: Avishalom? Baalolam? Arezriel?

WOMAN: Those are good guesses. I think we are close.

LILITH: Tepenuah? Serepahel? Raphiadon? Is his name Simchaeli?

*(The Hasid slumps down, as though unconscious. The woman laughs merrily.)*

WOMAN: That was it! That was a very good guess! When you know the name of the angel, you can control the angel. Now let me show you something special. *(She opens the door behind the Hasid.)* Do you know what this room is?

LILITH: It is where we put prayer books when they are worn out, before we can bury them.

*(The woman nods, enters the room. The walls are lined with shelves and the shelves are covered in books. She takes one, shows it to Lilith. Then she presses the book up to her nose and inhales deeply.)*

WOMAN: It smells like I remember. Like lemon grass and turnips.

*(The woman pulls a page from the books, then touches it to her tongue. She sighs, her body relaxing. Then she greedily eats the page.)*

WOMAN: The holy books are sweet, but do you know what is the sweetest of all?

LILITH: *(Startled.)* No.

WOMAN: The written name of God. A page of a prayer book is like a date and nut pudding, but it is sweeter if the name of God is written on it. It is like sweet jam pastries.

LILITH: It is not right that you are eating the holy books.

WOMAN: Why not? The prophet Ezekiel ate a scroll, why shouldn't I?

LILITH: Should she be doing this, angel Simchaeli?

*(The Hasid sits upright, and the woman yelps.)*

WOMAN: You would be doing me a great favor, daughter of Zion, if you would say the angel's name again? *(The Hasid rises.)*

LILITH: Why don't you say his name?

WOMAN: It is forbidden for me to speak holy things. Please help me.

LILITH: No. It is not right that you are eating the holy books.

*(The Hasid enters the room with the woman. He takes the prayer book from her, sets it down gently. Lilith closes the door on them, returns to her father. The activity in the room speeds up to normal and the noises of prayer return.)*

REB KITZIS: What have you been doing, Lilith?

LILITH: Talking to angels.

REB KITZIS: Is that a fact? It is said my grandfather talked to angels.

LILITH: Tell me a story about him.

REB KITZIS: He was a Hasid even before there were Hasidim. He was a Hasid before he met the Ba'al Shem Tov. I will tell you my favorite story about Wolf Kitzis.

*(Sounds of commotion come from behind the closed door. These sounds go unnoticed by all but Lilith, who glances to look.)*

REB KITZIS: When Wolf Kitzis was very old he decided to go to the Holy Land. The Ba'al Shem Tov accompanied him to the boat, to see him off. Before the boat left, he gave Wolf Kitzis a stern warning. He said: "If you see anyone along the way who asks you how the Jews are doing, you must tell them the truth: That we are suffering. Our lives are poor and the non-Jews attack us at every opportunity." And Wolf Kitzis promised he would tell the truth.

*(More sounds of commotion from behind the door, and a woman's screams. Again, only Lilith notices.)*

REB KITZIS: When the boat was away at sea there was a terrible storm. The ship ran aground in Turkey, and all the passengers were brought to an inn for the night. Wolf Kitzis never made it to the inn. He felt as though he was dreaming and he wandered away from the group. Finally, he came to an enormous house. A man came out of the house and greeted him, and took him in and fed him. After the meal the man asked, "How go things with the Jews?" And Wolf Kitzis answered "God looks after them." Then Wolf Kitzis went to bed.

*(Smoke comes out from under the door. Lilith looks on.)*

REB KITZIS: Wolf Kitzis woke the next morning and found his way back to the boat. When they were at sea, he remembered his promise to the Ba'al Shem Tov. He was so filled with grief that he turned away from the Holy Land and went back to Poland. The Ba'al Shem Tov met him at the docks, and told him: "The man you met was Abraham the Patriarch. Every day he asks God how go things for the

Jews, and every day God says, 'I look after them.' If you had told Abraham that we suffer, he might have interceded on our behalf." *(He frowns.)* Is that smoke?

*(A commotion begins as Hasids rise from their prayers, shouting, and rush over to the closed door. Smoke pours out from under it. They open it to reveal a fire. The woman inside hurtles herself out, howling. She runs through the synagogue like an animal, leaping over pews. Only Lilith watches her go.)*

*The Hasidim now remove the makeshift synagogue, and the Hasidic boys circle around Lilith.)*

YITZIK: The mother of demons started the fire to escape the angel.

LILITH: Yes.

YITZIK: I have also seen the mother of demons. When my face was cut.

*(A CROWD OF NON-JEWS enters, crying out angrily, and the children freeze in place.)*

YITZIK: What is that noise?

*(A JEWISH MERCHANT stands before the upstage door, arms crossed. The angry crowd circles around him. Two Hasidim enter and stand back a distance, watching.)*

REB KITZIS: *(To the children.)* What are you watching? *(He looks at the crowd.)* Stay here, Lilith. Keep everybody by your side. *(He crosses to the Hasids.)* Why the commotion?

HASID ONE: This is the shop of Shlomo Steiner, the jeweler.

HASID TWO: The non-Jews believe he stole from their church.

REB KITZIS: Shlomo Steiner is a wealthy man. What would a church have that he does not already possess?

HASID ONE: A portrait of the Virgin Mary.

HASID TWO: The non-Jews believe that we desecrate their religious icons.

HASID ONE: Those two men in front are demanded that they enter the store, so they can search it.

REB KITZIS: Where are the police?

*(TWO POLICE enter, blowing whistles.)*

HASID TWO: There they are, but they will do nothing.

*(The commotion continues, and the merchant gestures at the police.)*

MERCHANT: Why do you do nothing? *(A non-Jew pushes his way toward the merchant, who shoves him back into the crowd.)* That for you! That for any of you who try to enter my store. *(To police.)* Why don't you help me?

REB KITZIS: We must help him.

HASID ONE: Help Shlomo Steiner? He is misnaggedim, Reb Kitzis.

HASID TWO: He hates Hasidim, Reb Kitzis.

REB KITZIS: But he is a Jew, and we must help him.

*(Two non-Jews press toward the door, and the merchant rolls up his sleeves.)*

REB KITZIS: We must bar the door.

*(Reb Kitzis marches into the crowd. The Hasidim watch — dumbfounded — then glance at each other nervously. They shrug and follow Reb Kitzis into the crowd.)*

*(The three push through the crowd until they emerge next to the merchant. Two non-Jews scream at the man.)*

NON-JEW ONE: If you are innocent, why won't you let us search your store?

NON-JEW TWO: If you won't let us search, you must be guilty. Out of the way, Jew!

*(The first non-Jew makes motions to pass, and Reb Kitzis seizes him, throwing him backwards. The two other Hasidim grab the arms of the second non-Jew and throw him back into the crowd. The Hasidim link arms in front of the door to the store, barring it with their bodies.)*

MERCHANT: *(Angrily.)* I don't need your help, Hasid!

NON-JEW ONE: *(Shaking a fist.)* Either I go in or we all go in!

*(A cheer erupts from the crowd.)*

REB KITZIS: None of you will enter!

HASID ONE: *(Terrified.)* What is it Jews should say before they die?

HASID TWO: The Shema.

HASID ONE: Now might be the time.

HASID TWO: Shema Yisroel, Adonai Elohainu . . .

HASID ONE: . . . Adonai ekhad!

MERCHANT: *(To the police.)* Why do you do nothing?

NON-JEW ONE: We will all go in!

*(The crowd cheers and surges forward. The force of their bodies pushes the merchant, Reb Kitzis and the two Hasidim into the door.*

*Yitzik Meyer turns to Lilith, horrified. He begins to run forward, but Lilith seizes him.)*

LILITH: Stop! We must stay here!

YITZIK: Your father . . .!

LILITH: *(Intensely.)* We. Stay. Here.

*(A policeman blows his whistle, and the police rush through the door into the merchant's shop. Moments later the crowd of non-Jews flee the store, hands filled with stolen goods.*

*The crowd carries with them lengths of rope, dragging something out of the store. The figure tumbles out of the fleeing crowd, crashes to the ground. It is Reb Kitzis, bloodied and dead.*

*Yitzik turns to Lilith, who drops to her knees, hand pressed to her mouth. Yitzik cries out and flees the stage, his terrified screams disappearing far into the distance.)*

## Act One — Scene Four:

*(Lilith stands hand in hand with the DIRECTOR OF THE KISHINEV ORPHANAGE. He is an officious little man in a bowler hat and black vest. He lectures her.)*

**DIRECTOR:** What a lucky, lucky girl you are. Do you know how lucky you are? *(Lilith shakes her head.)* Would you like to learn how to sew, and make a living stitching suits? Or some girls make flowers out of silk! How does that sound? You wouldn't like that, would you? *(Lilith shakes her head.)* Most orphans are not so lucky as you are. Five girls have come in this month like you, with their fathers dead or in jail. Do you think anyone will claim them? *(Lilith shakes her head.)* They won't have your life, Hasid girl. There will be no mansion for them, no vineyard, no carriage rides. You should thank the Master of the Universe for taking you out of this orphanage. Ah, here is your Rebbeh.

*(Enter the Rebbeh, followed by Reb Yossele and a half-dozen HASIDS walking in a single-file line. They cross toward Lilith, and the Rebbeh gestures to her.)*

**REBBEH:** Come, Lilith.

*(Lilith runs to the Rebbeh's side, and Reb Yossele crosses to the director, handing him a pouch filled with money. The director shakes Reb Yossele's hand.)*

**DIRECTOR:** The girl must be special if the Rebbeh himself takes an interest in her.

**REB YOSSELE:** She is special. She is a Hasid.

*(The Rebbeh kneels to talk to Lilith, squeezing her shoulders and smiling broadly at her.)*

**REBBEH:** You shall have your own room at my house, Lilith. How does that sound? *(Lilith shrugs.)* Why don't you speak, daughter of Zion? Is it because you are still sad? *(Lilith nods.)* I understand. But God gave you a voice, and we are commanded not to waste that which is useful. Do not remain silent for too long, Lilith.

*(An OLD HASID enters carrying a large frame. He hurries over to Reb Yossele, They speak in whispers for a moment, and then Reb Yossele leads the old Hasid to the Rebbeh.)*

**REB YOSSELE:** This is the butcher Mordekhai Mlotek, Rebbeh. He has brought you a gift.

*(The old Hasid hands the Rebbeh the frame. The Rebbeh examines it.)*

**REBBEH:** *(Delighted.)* What have you brought me, Reb Mlotek? Is this for my wall?

**OLD HASID:** *(Trembling.)* Yes, Rebbeh.

**REBBEH:** It is a fine gift. Look, Lilith, isn't it fine?

**REB YOSSELE:** *(Whispering to the Rebbeh.)* The butcher is engaged to marry, but he is worried. The matchmaker has linked him to a divorcee.



*(The Rebbeh embraces the old Hasid, who bursts into surprised tears.)*

REBBEH: Your marriage will be a joyous one, Reb Mlotek, with the help of God Almighty.

OLD HASID: You have looked into my heart, Rebbeh! It is true! You can look into a man's heart!

REBBEH: Rabbi Tanhum said: A man who has no wife is not a man.

OLD HASID: Blessed is your wisdom, Rebbeh.

REBBEH: Blessed is the Holy One, praise be to Him to whom all praise is due.

*(The old Hasid nods and Reb Yossele leads him away. The Rebbeh takes Lilith's hand, smiles down at her.)*

REBBEH: Did you like my answer to the butcher, Lilith?

LILITH: *(Frowning.)* Yes.

REBBEH: Ah, she speaks! But you have a funny look on your face. Do you have a question?

LILITH: Didn't Rabbi Eleazar make the quote about the wife?

REBBEH: Yes, Rabbi Eleazar. What did I say?

LILITH: Rabbi Tanhum.

REBBEH: You have good ears, Lilith, and a good memory. Your father's learning lives on in you! I think you will be of great help in my home, Lilith Kitzis. *(He begins to walk, hand in hand with Lilith. The Hasids follow mutely.)* In fact, I may already have a chore for you.

## Act One — Scene Five

*(The drone of Yiddish returns.)*

YAAKOV: Do you remember your wedding?

DOVID: It was a joyous affair. Yours?

YAAKOV: Everybody wept.

DOVID: A successful wedding!

YAAKOV: I wept.

DOVID: Yes?

YAAKOV: For two weeks.

DOVID: How did your wife feel about that?

YAAKOV: She was too busy trying to console her father. He wept for three weeks. He was not fond of me.

*(A YOUNG HASID enters at one end of the stage, standing by an open door. Light streams out from inside the door. Lilith, the Rebbeh and Reb Yossele enter from the opposite end of the stage, walking toward the young Hasid.)*

REBBEH: Here is your chore. We has a wedding today, Lilith.

REB YOSSELE: But we have a problem. We need you to stay in the bedchamber with the bride and groom.

LILITH: Because the bride is having her monthly cycle?

REBBEH: *(Surprised.)* Her monthly cycle? Yes. How did you know?

LILITH: I read it. In the Shulkhan Arukh. The groom may not touch the bride during her monthly cycle.

REBBEH: Yes. It is a custom to have a girl sleep in the bed with the bride — to discourage the groom.

LILITH: Discourage him from what?

REB YOSSELE: *(Laughing.)* Ah, *that* is not in the Shulkhan Arukh!

*(They reach the young Hasid. He kneels down and strokes Lilith's hair.)*

YOUNG HASID: Hello, Lilith. Did you know your father was once my teacher?

LILITH: He was?

YOUNG HASID: I was going to get married on the day he died. We postponed the wedding, because we would not mix tragedy with happiness. I will be studying with the Rebbeh in the library. Will you keep my bride company?

LILITH: Yes.

*(The young Hasid nods. He rises, and then he exits with Reb Yossele and the Rebbeh. SHAINA ROISE, a Hasidic girl in her late teens, comes to the door in her nightclothes.)*

SHAINA: Are you Lilith Kitzis?

LILITH: Yes.

SHAINA: I am Shaina Roise. Did you know that you are famous?

LILITH: I am famous?

SHAINA: Yes. I am from Romania, and I have heard of you. My aunt in Poland has heard of you. Many Hasidim know your name.

LILITH: Why?

SHAINA: Because there are rumors about you. Have you heard them?

LILITH: No.

SHAINA: Everybody talks. They say you almost died at birth, and that the Rebbeh changed your name to fool the angel of death. They say you have the Talmud memorized, and that you have read every book in the Rebbeh's library.

LILITH: Why do they talk about me?

SHAINA: Because they say you see things nobody else can. They say you can see the future. They talk about you, and they talk about your father. They say he was one of the 36 secret saints.

LILITH: He's dead. *(She weeps.)* He's dead, and they put me in an orphanage!

SHAINA: Oh, Lilith, I know! *(Embraces her.)* I know how terrible you must feel! My father also died when I was your age. He fell off a roof.

LILITH: Why was he on a roof?

SHAINA: He was trying to get his hat.

LILITH: Why was his hat there?

SHAINA: Non-Jewish children threw his hat on the roof. They were teasing him.

LILITH: Did you cry?

SHAINA: Yes, and I was very angry. I used to beat up Gentile children.

LILITH: You beat them up?

SHAINA: Yes, and can you imagine how surprised they were? I was very small, but they ran whenever they saw me. *(She kisses Lilith's head, wipes her tears.)* I don't know anyone here, Lilith. I moved here to marry, and I never met my husband before I got here. I am afraid that I will be lonely. Do you know what that's like?

LILITH: Yes.

SHAINA: Then will you promise to be my friend?

LILITH: Yes.

SHAINA: Good, I feel better. Do you feel better?

LILITH: A little.

SHAINA: You look tired.

LILITH: I have had bad dreams.

SHAINA: Well, let's decide to have nothing but good dreams — starting tonight. I used to think that if I wanted it, I could dream of the face of the man I was going to marry. But I did not dream of my husband's face.

LILITH: I already know who I will marry.

SHAINA: Really? You must tell me!

LILITH: Only if you promise to keep it a secret.

SHAINA: I will never tell. Who is it that you will marry?

LILITH: The Rebbeh. I will marry the Rebbeh.

## Act Two — Scene One:

- DOVID: Speaking of marriage, how is your wife, Yaakov?
- YAAKOV: My wife? You've met her. She's not beautiful, she can't cook, she belittles me constantly, and her family won't speak to me because I am a Zionist.
- DOVID: I meant, how is her health?
- YAAKOV: Ach, I wish you hadn't asked. She has developed some sort of skin rash, and she keeps me awake late at night moaning. Her teeth have gone bad, and she can only eat food if it's mushed up.
- DOVID: That's terrible!
- YAAKOV: Nu, what did I expect? I married for love.
- DOVID: You didn't use a matchmaker?
- YAAKOV: I was too modern for that. With my education, I could have married a merchant's daughter.
- DOVID: But you chose this one?
- YAAKOV: I couldn't resist her good qualities.
- DOVID: Like for example?
- YAAKOV: Like for example she tolerates me.
- DOVID: So you are well matched.
- YAAKOV: Anyone else would have divorced her by now. Anyone else would have divorced me by now.
- DOVID: Matchmakers make money, but God makes marriages.
- YAAKOV: *(Surprised.)* You sometimes don't sound like an atheist, Dovid.

*(Lilith (now an adult) enters stage right, with Shaina Roise next to her and three Hasidic women trailing behind. Zalman Bar (also an adult) enters stage left with his two assistants. The two groups meet in the center of the stage and pause.)*

- ZALMAN BAR: We are on our way to a circumcision, Lilith Kitzi. It would be a mitzvah for you to step aside and let us pass.
- LILITH: We are on our way to the ritual bath, because I am getting married. It would be a mitzvah for you to let us pass, Zalman Bar.

ZALMAN BAR: *(Laughs.)* Yes, we know about the wedding. I'm sure the Rebbeh will be very happy. Now all of his books will have pinholes in them.

ASSISTANT ONE: Do you know what we have heard about the Rebbeh? We hear he is too old to remember the names of his Hasidim, so he has a man whisper in his right ear.

ASSISTANT TWO: And we hear that the Rebbeh cannot remember the Talmud, so he has a young girl whisper in his left ear.

ZALMAN BAR: Now he marries the young girl. It must be for the whispering — Why else would he want you?

ASSISTANT ONE: Do you know how to cook? Or sew? Have you ever swept a floor?

SHAINA: *(Angrily.)* Lilith does not need to do those things!

ASSITANT TWO: What sort of dowry do you bring? Tableware? Or bedding? Or candlesticks?

SHAINA: The Rebbeh does not need any of those things! Lilith brings her yikhus, and that is enough!

ASSISTANT ONE: Her yikhus? Her good name? She is the great-granddaughter of the follower of a heretic.

ASSISTANT ONE: Perhaps this is impressive for Hasidim. If Lilith were misnaggedim she would be lucky to marry the village idiot.

LILITH: Then I shall thank the Master of the Universe that I am not a misnagged.

ZALMAN BAR: Why not? Every day we thank the Master of the Universe for the very same thing.

LILITH: Neither of us will stand aside to let the other pass, iluy. How shall we resolve this?

ZALMAN BAR: God will provide an answer, Hasid.

LILITH: Perhaps God does not need to provide an answer. Shaina, do you have my riding crop?

SHAINA: Yes. *(She produces a riding crop, hands it to Lilith.)*

ZALMAN BAR: *(Nervously.)* What are you doing?

*(Lilith raises the riding crop, then beats Zalman Bar with it. He cries out in pain and stumbles backward, into the arms of his assistants. They tumble backwards. Lilith nods.)*

LILITH: That is a satisfactory answer. Come, Hasidim. *(The Hasidic women step around the fallen misnaggedim. Lilith snorts.)* If I were to marry the village idiot, I would certainly be marrying you, Zalman Bar.

*(They exit and the misnaggedim stagger to their feet, then offstage. As they do so Lilith and Shaina re-enter, Lilith now dressed in a long white gown. The Hasidic women push in a wooden ritual bath. Lilith tugs on her hair, grimaces.)*

LILITH: Shaina, when you braided my hair like this and put sugar in it, you did not tell me the sugar would stick to my scalp.

SHAINA: Didn't I? I thought I had.

LILITH: All you told me is that this is your custom.

SHAINA: Yes, so that your wedding will be sweet. It is one of my favorite traditions.

LILITH: Won't it be painful when I have my hair cut?

SHAINA: You can't even imagine, Lilith! When I had my hair cut, the pain was unbearable!

LILITH: *(Sighs.)* This is what I wish you had told me.

SHAINA: Oh, Lilith — Brides always weep for their hair.

LILITH: Do you know why we cut off all our hair before we get married?

SHAINA: I was told it is so that we will no longer be attractive to anybody but our husbands.

LILITH: There is more.

*(Lilith sits near the bath. One Hasidic woman begins to cut her hair while another clips her fingernails. Lilith winces.)*

LILITH: In mysticism, the bride is the symbol of the Land of Israel. The Jewish people are not complete, because we are exiled from our homeland. So we cut our hair to show that the bride is not complete. When the messiah comes, he will return our long hair to us. Do you know why we bathe ourselves after our monthly cycle?

SHAINA: Does it also have to do with the messiah?

LILITH: No. We do this to protect ourselves. The impure body attracts demons. If we do not bathe, they will come in through our windows and eat our flesh.

SHAINA: *(Startled.)* Demons eat our flesh?

LILITH: Demons are attracted to everything that was holy but is now impure. I have seen it.

SHAINA: You have seen it?



LILITH: I have seen demons. They come into our synagogues at night. *(Lilith rises.)* It is time for the mikvah.

*(Lilith climbs to the ritual bath and immerses herself, dunking under the water for a number of seconds. When she emerges, one of the Hasidic women nods.)*

HASIDIC WOMAN ONE: Daughter of Zion, you are ritually pure.

*(Lilith immerses herself again.)*

HASIDIC WOMAN TWO: Daughter of Zion, you are ritually pure.

*(Lilith immerses herself again.)*

SHAINA: You are ritually pure, Lilith! You are ready to be a bride!

*(The women exit with the ritual bath, and the Rebbeh enters with Reb Yossele and a chair. The Rebbeh wears a kittel, a white gown. He seats himself, looking exhausted. Two MASSIVE HASIDIM enter and cross their arms, guarding the Rebbeh.)*

*(The band begins playing festive music, and the sounds of celebration can be heard. Now two IDENTICAL TWIN HASIDIM enter, giggling. They point offstage.)*

TWIN ONE: Such a spectacle! There are Hasidim here from all over Europe!

TWIN TWO: I have heard that almost one thousand people have come for the wedding, each bearing gifts.

TWIN ONE: We have brought nothing! How will we get an audience with the Rebbeh?

TWIN TWO: Let's go to him before the wedding.

*(They cross toward the Rebbeh, but the massive Hasidim block their way.)*

MASSIVE HASID: The Rebbeh is seeing nobody.

TWIN ONE: *(Turning away, conspiratorially.)* Our way is barred.

TWIN TWO: What shall we do?

TWIN ONE: Seek another way?

TWIN TWO: Exactly what I was thinking!

*(They exit, and a moment later open a door at the back of the stage and peer through at the Rebbeh.)*

TWIN ONE: *(Whispering.)* There he is!

TWIN TWO: Dare we approach?

TWIN ONE: We are here already.

TWIN TWO: Then we must.

*(The twins rap on the door, and when Reb Yossele turn to look at them they flash toothy grins. He crosses to them, angrily.)*

REB YOSSELE: The Rebbeh is seeing nobody today, boys. He is exhausted from fasting.

TWIN ONE: We wish to give him our best on his wedding day, Reb Yossele.

TWIN TWO: Would you deny us that mitzvah, Reb Yossele?

REBBEH: *(Stirring.)* Who is that there?

REB YOSSELE: Make this brief.

*(He leads the twins to them Rebbeh. Reb Yossele leans down to the Rebbeh, whispers in his ear.)*

REB YOSSELE: Hayyim and Nakhum Blume, Rebbeh.

REBBEH: I remember you boys. You're twins, aren't you?

TWIN ONE: Twins, yes.

TWIN TWO: We used to play at your house when we were little.

REBBEH: I remember. You used to terrorize us, running around and hiding, climbing through windows. You are in a yeshiva now?

TWIN ONE: Yes, in Dubnow.

TWIN TWO: We took time off from our studies to visit you.

REBBEH: To terrorize me again?

TWIN ONE: No! To give you our best wishes!

TWIN TWO: And to participate in the blessing of a Rebbeh's wedding!

REBBEH: Thank you, boys. It's a great mitzvah you do. Study is good, but this too is Torah.

*(A knock comes at the door. Reb Yossele answers it and several OLD HASIDIM enter the room. They confer, and Reb Yossele nods. He crosses to the Rebbeh, leans down to him and whispers.)*

REB YOSSELE: The wedding begins, Rebbeh.

REBBEH: Do you know, Reb Yossele, I was not sure this day would ever come.

REB YOSSELE: It will be a joyous day.

*(They exit, and the stage fills with Hasidim, all carrying lit candles. FOUR HASIDIM enter carrying the HUPPA, a prayer shawl suspended in the air by four poles, creating something like a makeshift tent.*

*An ENERGETIC HASID paces back and forth in front of the huppa, addressing the crowd and waving his hands excitedly.)*

ENERGETIC HASID: At the first wedding in history God Himself adorned Eve as a bride. Angels stood at the marriage canopy and the Master of the Universe pronounced the blessing over the bridal couple. The angels then danced and played musical instruments for Adam and Eve in the 10 bridal chambers of gold, pearl and precious stones that God had prepared for them.

TWIN ONE: *(Entering and gesturing toward the energetic Hasid.)* Look.

TWIN TWO: *(Also entering.)* Is that?

TWIN ONE: The Prague Badkan, who else?

TWIN TWO: I hear he traveled 1,000 miles to get here, and later tonight he will travel 1,000 miles to get home again.

TWIN ONE: But who else could play jester at the Rebbeh's wedding?

ENERGETIC HASID: Look around you tonight, Hasidim! At the Rebbeh's wedding angels once again dance and play instruments!

*(A murmur of excitement goes through the crowd. The Rebbeh is led in by a procession of old Hasids, with Reb Yossele trailing behind. The Rebbeh seems exhausted; he leans heavily against two in the procession who support him.)*

ENERGETIC HASID: They're leading in the groom! The Rebbeh has arrived!

*(The procession leads the Rebbeh to the huppa. Now Lilith enters, led by a procession of Hasidic women carrying candles, Shaina Roise among them. Lilith is dressed in the Yemenite wedding dress with a veil covering her face.)*

ENERGETIC HASID: They are leading the bride!

*(Lilith's procession leads her to the huppa, where she takes her place next to the Rebbeh. He turns to her.)*

TWIN ONE: Now he lifts her veil.

TWIN TWO: The most frightening moment of the wedding.

TWIN ONE: The Rebbeh is blessed. He already knows what his bride looks like.

TWIN TWO: I have been at weddings where the groom cried out with terror when he saw his bride.

*(The Rebbeh lifts Lilith's veil, revealing her face, which is radiant. He lowers the veil. A RABBI approaches, carrying a goblet. He mutters a prayer and the crowd shouts out OIMEN! The rabbi sips from the goblet, then passes it to the Rebbeh*

*The Rebbeh sips and passes the goblet to Lilith, who also sips. Shaina Roise busts into noisy sobbing.)*

TWIN ONE: Ah, the first tears of the evening.

TWIN TWO: They won't be the last.

*(Lilith now walks slowly around the Rebbeh, seven times, seven circles.)*

TWIN ONE: Look, the bride does not weep!

TWIN TWO: Why should she weep?

*(One of the Rebbeh's retinue hands the Rebbeh a sheet of parchment with elaborate Hebrew writing upon it. The Rebbeh lifts it, reads aloud from it.)*

REBBEH: "May it come to sprout like a green garden whoso finds a wife finds great good, and obtains favor of the good Lord who ratifies this union." *(Loudly.)* This is my marriage contract. For seven years I have had a voice whispering in my ears, as though the Talmud itself were at my side saying the words of the great rabbis to me. With this contract that voice now becomes my bride, and I become her groom. All that I possess I share with her, and when I am gone all that I have will become hers.

TWIN TWO: Who would weep upon hearing that?

TWIN ONE: Not only does she marry the Rebbeh, she marries his money.

TWIN TWO: Shh. Money in the Rebbeh's hand does us honor.

TWIN ONE: Blessed be the money of the Rebbeh.

*(The Rebbeh signs the parchment. He then takes out a large ring and places it on Lilith's finger.)*

REBBEH: Behold, thou art consecrated unto me, according to the Law of Moses and Israel.

*(The rabbi now hands the goblet to Lilith, who sips again. She passes the goblet to the Rebbeh, who likewise sips, then flings the goblet against the wall.*

*When the goblet clatters against the wall, the Hasids throw their arms up in the air, calling out MAZEL TOV! They embrace the bride and groom, swallowing them up. Joyous music plays.*

*Suddenly, a commotion goes up in the crowd. They move backward, revealing the Rebbeh on the ground, hand clutched to chest. Reb Yossele kneels next to the Rebbeh.)*

TWIN ONE: Oh, look! The Rebbeh has collapsed!

## Act Two — Scene Two:

*(The drone of Yiddish return. Yaakov looks at his watch.)*

YAAKOV: Four hours.

DOVID: We're Zionists, Yaakov. It is our lot in life to sit through long meetings. And it's wrapping up.

YAAKOV: Did I ever tell you why I became a Zionist?

DOVID: No.

YAAKOV: It is because I was a Rabbinic student. All I studied was Talmudic method — questioning, and then questioning the questions.

DOVID: And you were unhappy?

YAAKOV: Bored, yes. Unhappy, no; but I was arrested.

DOVID: What? Why?

YAAKOV: I was drafted into the Tsar's army, and I refused to go. They took me to court and I decided to defend myself.

DOVID: Using the Talmudic method?

YAAKOV: Exactly. The judge said to me "Are you Yaakov Adler," and I answered "Who else?"

DOVID: Ah. Questions and then more questions.

YAAKOV: Talmud! Then the judge asked me, "Are you a student at the Pinsk academy?" and I answered "Can you name a better school?"

DOVID: This must have confounded him.

YAAKOV: It annoyed him. "Jew," he asked, "do you plan to answer every one of my questions with another question?"

DOVID: And you answered?

YAAKOV: "Is there a problem if I do?"

DOVID: Ah, you stumped him again! How long could this continue?

YAAKOV: Not long. Despite the genius of the Talmudic method, the judge found me guilty and sentenced me to seven years in jail.

DOVID: *(Stunned.)* That is not the punch line I was expecting.

YAAKOV: It is not much of a punch line because it is not much of a joke, but it is a true story. In jail I met a number of Socialists, and I renounced God. Life made me a Jew, but the Tsar made me a revolutionary.

DOVID: And as a Jew and a revolutionary, what else could you be but a Zionist?

YAAKOV: Exactly. Ah, look: Here comes Yitzik Meyer, the poet.

*(Several ZIONISTS in suits and sashes bring a podium onto the stage. YITZIK MEYER (now an adult and only recognizable by the long scar on his face) enters and stands before the podium.)*

YITZIK: I have been asked to end this conference with a poem. This is titled "The Murdered Child," and was commissioned by the *New York Circle Press* after a pogrom in Lithuania. *(reading:)*

There was the body of an infant  
That was discovered on Good Friday  
A killing shocking in its cruelty  
His throat cut from ear to ear.  
Soon the newspapers they printed  
It was the result of ritual murder  
And there were clergy and they insisted  
That the Hebrews take blame here.

It was a slander that was common  
And none were any sadder  
When they laid hands on a shearer  
And he was beaten by a mob  
Who laughed and took his shears  
And then cut away his sidelocks  
And they drowned him in a river  
And then boasted of it, proud.

There was the body of an infant  
And it was clear he had been tortured  
It was claimed his blood was stolen  
To be baked in Jewish bread.  
There were many then that gathered  
And sang songs of Simon of Trent  
And they shattered Jewish windows  
And left six on that day dead.

It was a slander that was common  
And was spoken by those that made haste  
To take axes to a synagogue  
And destroy the Torah scroll  
They took it to the streets, then  
They unrolled it and then tore it

And forced it into the rabbi's mouth  
And they made him eat it whole.

It was a slander that was common  
This slander, it was common  
It was a slander that was common  
And none were any sadder.

YAAKOV: (*Grinning, shocked.*) So the conference ends on a high note!

DOVID: What a distressing poem!

YAAKOV: Remind me to get a copy of it so I can read it at my next party.

DOVID: I don't think I shall be able to sleep tonight, I am so depressed.

YAAKOV: Look: Yitzik Meyer exits the building. Let's go speak to him.

*(They rise and hurry over to Yitzik, who is surrounded by ZIONISTS who shake hands with him and make small talk.)*

ZIONIST ONE: How does it feel to return to Kishinev?

YITZIK: (*Glancing about.*) Looking at it, the city doesn't seem to have changed much since I was a child.

YAAKOV: We have a new police chief.

YITZIK: Yes?

YAAKOV: Yes. Aleksandr Konstantinovich Khanzenkov. He is a bitter anti-Semite.

*(The Zionists nod their heads, troubled.)*

ZIONIST TWO: It is true. If a Jew needs help from the police, they must bribe him.

YAAKOV: Then there is Vice-Governor V.G. Ustrugov, and Andrei Ivanovich Stepanov, the head of the Kishinev Artisans' Council. Every year another anti-Semite comes to power here, and the newspapers print libel about us.

YITZIK: I've heard about this.

ZIONIST ONE: Four out of ten people in Kishinev are Jews.

ZIONIST TWO: And the remaining six are Jew haters.

YAAKOV: I have heard you are friends with Theodore Herzl, Yitzik Meyer.

YITZIK: Yes.



YAAKOV: You tell him unless his revolution happens and the Jews have a homeland soon, there will be no Jews left.

YITZIK: And who should I tell him said this?

ZIONIST ONE: This is Yaakov Adler, Reb Meyer.

YITZIK: Yaakov Adler, the humorist? I've read your writing. Your stories are usually so funny.

YAAKOV: Would you like to hear one of my funny stories?

YITZIK: Yes, certainly.

YAAKOV: Do you know who Pavolchi Krushevan is?

YITZIK: Yes. He is the editor of the daily newspaper.

YAAKOV: Of all those who hate Jews in Kishinev, he hates Jews the most. One day he fell into the river Byk. He would have drowned, but a Jew saw him and jumped in to save him.

YITZIK: Ah, the irony.

YAAKOV: Pavolchi Krushevan was so grateful that he promised the Jew anything he wanted. And do you know what the Jew answered?

YITZIK: He answered that Pavolchi Krushevan was never to tell anybody that he was saved by a Jew.

YAAKOV: Ah. You've heard this joke.

YITZIK: I've heard it in every city in Europe, Reb Adler. There are Pavolchi Krushevans everywhere.

*(Lilith brushes past the group, not noticing them, trailed by Reb Yossele and Shaina Roise. Lilith still wears her wedding dress. Yitzik sees her and gasps.)*

YITZIK: Is that Lilith Kitzi?

YAAKOV: The Maid of Kishinev, yes. Look, she is stopping in front of the house of Zalman Bar!

DOVID: But they hate each other!

*(Reb Yossele knocks at the door, and one of Zalman Bar's assistants answers.)*

REB YOSSELE: We wish to speak with Zalman Bar.

ASSISTANT: He is occupied with study. Can I give him a message?

REB YOSSELE: The Maid of Kishinev is here. She says Zalman Bar's father borrowed a book from her father 10 years ago, and she would like it returned.

*(The assistant nods, exits. Yitzik watches, fascinated.)*

YITZIK: I heard she married the Rebbeh.

YAAKOV: Yes. He died on the wedding night, and she has taken control of his Hasidim.

YITZIK: Is that her wedding dress?

YAAKOV: She always wears it, even a year after his death.

*(Zalman Bar appears at the door, scowling. He flings money to the ground in front of Lilith.)*

ZALMAN BAR: I burned the book, Maid of Kishinev. It better the book be destroyed than fall into the hands of heretics. Take the money for it.

LILITH: *(To Shaina.)* Give me my horsewhip.

*(Shaina produces a horsewhip and gives it to Lilith, who raises it into the air. Zalman Bar flinches.)*

ZALMAN BAR: *(Terrified.)* What are you doing?

LILITH: *(Striking him.)* A fool's lips cause arguments, iluy, and his mouth begs for a beating. My father's possessions are not yours to burn, and I do not want your money.

*(She spins on her heels and exits, Reb Yossele and Shaina Roise hurrying behind, leaving Zalman Bar on the ground groaning. The Zionists look at each other, astonished.)*

YITZIK: I see Lilith hasn't changed at all. You say the Rebbeh died the night he married her?

YAAKOV: Yes.

YITZIK: He probably misspoke a passage of Talmud and she beat him to death.

## Act Two — Scene Three:

*(HASIDIM bring a large, ornate wooden box onto the stage, set it down. Lilith enters, raises a wooden clapper and STRIKES IT, calling out:)*

LILITH: Hasidim, come to worship!

*(The stage fills with Hasidim, including Reb Yossele. Lilith pulls a prayer shawl over her shoulder, enters the wooden box. TWO REDHEADED HASIDIM look on, discussing, as the remaining Hasidim begin their prayers.)*

REDHEAD ONE: Do you see that it is ingenious?

REDHEAD TWO: Ingenious but improper. The Rebbeh's wife is not the Rebbeh. She stretches the law too far.

REDHEAD ONE: But look: women are not allowed to pray alongside men in the synagogue.

REDHEAD TWO: Yes. This is law. Men must pray, women are not required to do so. Women distract men, and this distraction may interfere with prayers. This makes sense. So women are kept separate in the synagogue.

REDHEAD ONE: But the Rebbeh's wife has built this screened box so that she may sit among the men. It is ingenious!

REDHEAD TWO: She stretches the law, and how far can the law be stretched before it breaks?

REDHEAD ONE: Nu, if you disapprove, why don't you leave? You wouldn't be the first.

REDHEAD TWO: I have worked the Rebbeh's vineyard for 30 years; I do not want to leave. But I tell you this: one more sacrilege and I will move to Dubnow to live with my cousin.

LILITH: *(Emerging from the box.)* Hasidim, leave the synagogue for a while.

*(The Hasidim remove their prayer shawls, exit, but for the redheads. They watch in amazement as HASIDIC WOMEN (including Shaina Rosie) file in and begin to drape themselves in prayer shawls. They cross to Reb Yossele.)*

REDHEAD ONE: Say there, Reb Yossele.

REDHEAD TWO: What goes on?

REB YOSSELE: This is the anniversary of the death of the Rebbeh. The Rebbeh's wife has formed a minyan of women to say the prayer for the dead.

REDHEAD TWO: *(Sputtering.)* What?

REB YOSSELE: According to the Rebbeh's wife, it is permissible by Jewish law, particularly since the Rebbeh did not have a son.

REDHEAD TWO: It is permissible for women to say the Kaddish?

REB YOSSELE: So long as it is only women.

REDHEAD TWO: (*Enraged.*) It is *not* permissible. This is too much. This is too much!

(*He exits.*)

REB YOSSELE: Where is he going?

REDHEAD ONE: Dubnow.

REB YOSSELE: And what of you?

REDHEAD ONE: Where would I go?

REB YOSSELE: So you will remain with the Rebbeh's wife?

REDHEAD ONE: Who am I to question the wisdom of the Rebbeh's wife? She has forgotten more Talmud than I have ever learned.

REB YOSSELE: And she has forgotten none of it.

(*This Hasid nods, exits. Reb Yossele crosses to Lilith.*)

LILITH: Did we lose another?

REB YOSSELE: To Dubnow. But for every one that leaves, three remain. They are very dedicated.

LILITH: They are Hasidim, they are among the righteous. Leave us now, Reb Yossele.

(*Reb Yossele nods and exits, and the Hasidic women gather around Lilith. They hold open prayerbooks.*)

SHAINA: Oh, I've never said the Kaddish, Lilith!

LILITH: It is a great blessing, Shaina; it is particularly great to say the prayer for the dead over the Rebbeh, blessed be his memory. Women should be able to participate in this blessing. Join me in reading, Hasidim. (*Chanting.*) Yis g'sal v'yis g'dash sh'mei raba.

(*The women chant the KADDISH. In the meanwhile, from offstage, come shouts. As Lilith and the women finish the prayer, Reb Yossele enters with a GYPSY. They cross to Lilith.*)

REB YOSSELE: Forgive the intrusion. This man has something to tell us. He is Sergei Berkovik; he is a musician.

LILITH: I remember, he played at my wedding.

*(The Gypsy speaks in Rumanian, and Reb Yossele listens.)*

LILITH: What is he saying, Reb Yossele?

REB YOSSELE: *(Translating.)* He says that your husband was a holy man, and he performed miracles, and now he hears stories about you.

LILITH: What stories?

REB YOSSELE: *(Talking to the Gypsy, then translating.)* There are people who say you ascend into Heaven when you pray, and that you talk with angels and with the dead. *(The Gypsy speaks excitedly, and Reb Yossele translates.)* He says if you can make miracles, you must do so, to save your people.

LILITH: Save them from what?

REB YOSSELE: *(Speaking to the Gypsy, then translating.)* He says plans are being made against the Jews. He says that there are signs posted around town saying that on Easter weekend the Tsar has given permission to rob the houses of the Jews. *(The Gypsy speaks, and Reb Yossele translates.)* He says that this is because of the murdered child.

LILITH: What murdered child?

REB YOSSELE: A 14-year-old Christian boy was found dead in Dubossary yesterday. *(The Gypsy speaks.)* He says that there is a rumor that the Jews killed the boy so his blood could be used to make our bread.

*(The Hasidic women respond in horror. Shaina clasps Lilith's hand.)*

SHAINA: Lilith?

LILITH: What else does he say.

REB YOSSELE: *(Posing a question to the Gypsy, then translating.)* He is speaking very fast, it is hard to understand him. He tells me they will burn the synagogues. *(The Gypsy speaks.)* He says they will destroy the houses of the merchants. *(The Gypsy speaks.)* He says the streets will turn to mud and the mud will be red, because it will be wet with the blood of Jews. *(The Gypsy speaks, and Reb Yossele falls silent.)*

LILITH: What else?

REB YOSSELE: Dear God in Heaven. He says that there is going to be a pogrom.

LILITH: Go out and gather the Hasidim and bring them in here, Reb Yossele. Instruct them to go through the prayer books and count the words. I want to know if words are missing.

SHAINA: And what of us?

LILITH: Put the word out, Shaina. This year I want all the Hasidim at the Rebbeh's house for Passover. And tell them that if they have guns or knives or pitchforks, they should bring them here.

*(Lilith nods, and the women exit.)*

REB YOSSELE: And what of you?

LILITH: I shall consult with God.

*(Lilith enters the box and Reb Yossele exits. Soon the stage begins filling with Hasidim, who take prayer books and sit down with them, leafing through them. A MASSIVE HASID enters, carrying a CHILD on his back.)*

*From inside Lilith's prayer box comes MOANING, and then HOWLING. The Hasidim pause to look, then return to their prayer books. The box begins shaking in place, and unearthly weeping emerges.*

*Reb Yossele enters and walks among the Hasidim, conferring with them. They speak to each other in excited whispers. Meanwhile, the box begins rocking violently, until it seems that it might burst apart. Then it falls silent, and the door opens. Reb Yossele hurries to it and assists Lilith in exiting the box. She seems exhausted. She grasps her clapper, pounds on it to get the attention of the Hasidim.)*

LILITH: Tell me, Hasidim, are there letters missing from m the siddur?

*(The Hasidim answer at once, a terrified cacophony:)*

HASID ONE: My prayerbook is missing seven letters!

HASID TWO: The name of God is missing in mine!

HASID THREE: I have found for books with entire pages torn out!

LILITH: Demons are loose in Kishinev, Hasidim! They seek our destruction!

HASID FOUR: God preserve us!

LILITH: God watches after his own. We shall arm ourselves, we shall celebrate the Passover together in this room, and we shall endure this. We are Hasidim, we are God's chosen, and He shall not allow the righteous to suffer. Come, Reb Yossele, we must make arrangements!

*(Lilith exits with Reb Yossele. The Hasidic child begins to weep, and his massive father comforts him.)*

MASSIVE HASID: Shh, Menakhem. The Maid of Kishinev will petition God for our salvation.  
If anyone can protect us, she can.

CHILD: Why?

MASSIVE HASID: As great as the Rebbeh was, his wife is equally great. For every miracle the Rebbeh produced, the Maid of Kishinev has also produced. Look around you: Angels dwell in this place, watching over us.

## Act Two — Scene Four

*(Dovid stands at a door backstage, prying a mezuzah off with a hammer. Yaakov watches him with interest. The mezuzah comes off and the both look at it.)*

YAAKOV: There is a discolored spot underneath.

DOVID: Underneath?

YAAKOV: Look: where the mezuzah used to be.

DOVID: If there is a pogrom, do you think they will look for mezuzahs, or the discolored spots where mezuzahs used to be?

YAAKOV: I suppose we'll find out. This is the first night of Passover; shouldn't we be able to smear lamb's blood on the door and have the angel of death pass over us?

DOVID: Is there more word about Dr. Kohan's housemaid?

YAAKOV: The suicide? It is rumored her corpse had wounds on its heels, and it was drained of blood. Two dead gentiles around the time of Passover, Dovid; it is not good for business.

DOVID: No.

YAAKOV: And this won't be the first Passover I have had ruined by non-Jews, either.

DOVID: Nu?

YAAKOV: When I was 15 my uncle Shlomo had Passover at his house. Shlomo had a non-Jewish business partner, and this business partner needed to get some papers from Shlomo.

DOVID: On the holiday?

YAAKOV: Which is forbidden! Uncle Shlomo couldn't conduct business in front of his entire family.

DOVID: How did he resolve this?

YAAKOV: He had an idea. "Listen," he told his friend, "I want you to stand outside my window and watch us eat. There will be a point in the evening when I pour a cup of wine for the prophet Elijah. When you see me raise that cup, I want you to knock at my door."

DOVID: As though he were the prophet?

YAAKOV: Exactly. Uncle Shlomo told his business partner, "I will say 'Who is it?' and you must answer, 'It is I, the prophet Elijah!'" Then I will answer the door and give you the cup of wine, and I will also hand you the papers you need."



DOVID: An ingenious plan.

YAAKOV: So the evening went by, and finally uncle Shlomo filled the wine cup for the prophet Elijah. He lifted it into the air and a knock came at his door.

DOVID: Perfectly timed!

YAAKOV: So my uncle Shlomo said, “Who is it?” and there was a long pause. Finally, a voice said, “It is I, the prophet . . . *Ebenezer!*”

*(Yaakov's wife (MRS. ADLER) enters, carrying trays of food, followed by Dovid's wife (MRS. LEVINSKY.))*

MRS. ADLER: Oh, husband! You and your stories! Nobody believes a word you say!

MRS. LEVINSKY: I think your husband is perfectly charming.

MRS. ADLER: Charming, oh yes! God protect me from charming men! Charm doesn't put bread on the table!

YAAKOV: You wouldn't be able to eat bread anyway, wife.

MRS. ADLER: Must you remind me of my illness? Don't I suffer enough?

*(Unnoticed, from offstage come the sounds of commotion.)*

YAAKOV: *(To Dovid.)* Do you see? She was such a beauty when I married her! I should have known better; I'd already met her mother.

MRS. ADLER: Why do you mention my mother?

YAAKOV: You're exactly like her! If there is something wrong with your mother, it is also wrong with you!

*(Now from offstage there comes the sounds of stones being thrown against a wall and windows. These also go unnoticed.)*

MRS. ADLER: Can't you behave? This is the first Passover we've been invited to in six years. Must you act like a fool?

YAAKOV: Passover? How many times must I explain to you that I am an atheist! We only came to Dovid's house because there is protection in numbers.

MRS. LEVINSKY: *(To Dovid.)* Your friend is an atheist?

YAAKOV: Of course, like Dovid.

MRS. LEVINSKY: My husband is not an atheist. *(To Dovid.)* Why does your friend think you're an atheist?

*(Dovid remains silent, uncomfortable.)*

MRS. LEVINSKY: Dovid?

DOVID: *(Suddenly.)* I'm an atheist and a Zionist. There, I said it!

YAAKOV: Your wife did not know?

MRS. LEVINSKY: You're a what and a what?

MRS. ADLER: Oh, Yaakov; here's another marvelous uncomfortable moment you have created!  
I can't imagine what could make this moment worse!

*(From offstage comes the sound of breaking glass. Yaakov flinches.)*

YAAKOV: Ah, just in time. Here is our pogrom.

## Act Two — Scene Four

*(The stage fills with Hasids. Many carry sticks and pitchforks. They bring in a long table and fill it with food. Some sit at the table, some take plates and sit on the floor. Lilith enters and takes a seat at the table, with Reb Yossele on her left and Shaina Roise on her right. A YOUNG HASID chants.)*

**YOUNG HASID:** Elyahu ha-novi, Eliyahu ha-tishbi, Eliyahu, Eliyahu, Eliyahu ha-giladi.  
Bimheyrak be-yomenu yavo elenu. Im moshiach ben Dovid, im moshiach ben Dovid.

*(Lilith stands and lifts a cup of wine. The Hasids do likewise.)*

**LILITH:** Elijah the prophet come to us quickly in our day, bringing the Messiah son of David.

*(The Hasids shout OIMEN! and drink from their wineglasses. A NERVOUS HASID passes through the crowd and approaches Reb Yossele. He whispers in Reb Yossele's ear. Lilith raises up a piece of matzo.)*

**LILITH:** This is the bread of our affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all that are hungry enter and eat, let all that are needy enter to share our Passover. This year here, next year in Jerusalem. This year as slaves, next year in freedom.

**REB YOSSELE:** *(Rising and whispering to Lilith.)* There is an emergency.

*He gestures as two Hasids bring in an INJURED HASID. The assembled Hasids respond with commotion, but Lilith raises her hand and silences them. She gestures, and the injured Hasid is brought to her.)*

**LILITH:** What happened?

**INJURED HASID:** I was attacked in my house. They pulled us into the streets and beat us.  
*(Sobbing.)* I don't know what has happened to my wife or my children.

**LILITH:** Reb Yossele, get this man a doctor.

*(Reb Yossele exits.)*

**LILITH:** What is going on in Kishinev? You must tell me.

**INJURED HASID:** It is terrible. I ran through the streets, and everywhere there was fire! I begged the police chief to help me. He asked how much money I had. He declared that he would protect any Jew who had 30 rubles, but any others would be on their own. *(He clutches at Lilith.)* What has happened to my wife, Maid of Kishinev? What has happened to my children? You can see these things — tell me!

**LILITH:** God watches after His own.

REB YOSSELE: *(Enters, panicking.)* There is something in the woods!

*(Lilith nods. She rises and takes a long sickle in her hands. She brandishes it, calling out to the other Hasids:)*

LILITH: Whatever happens, they must not enter the chapel or the library. They must not get at the holy books. Rise, Hasidim; we will show them that Jewish blood is not cheap!

*(The Hasids rise, taking up their sticks and pitchforks. They follow Lilith offstage, making quite a commotion. A ROAR goes up offstage, and then the sounds of FIGHTING and GUNSHOTS.)*

## Act Two — Scene FIVE

*(The stage is lined with MURDER VICTIMS, posed for a PHOTOGRAPHER with a clumsy box camera. All the dead are Zionists; all are dressed in top hats and red sashes.*

*Yitzik Meyer, Dovid Levinsky, Yaakov Adler and a FOURTH ZIONIST (BARUKH GOLDSTEIN) stand behind the photographer, observing him. Yaakov has his arm in a sling.)*

YAAKOV: I have heard a story from last night.

YITZIK: Tell me.

YAAKOV: And you will tell it to Theodore Herzl?

YITZIK: He has asked me to report on everything I see and hear.

YAAKOV: I heard that a Russian on horseback attacked a Jew in the streets. The Russian held a sword in one hand and a pistol in the other. He said to the Jew, "Tell me a story. If the story is true, I will shoot you, but if the story is a lie I will stab you with my sword." So the clever Jew said, "You are about to shoot me."

DOVID: Ah, I see. If the Russian stabbed him, the Jew would have told a lie. In that case, the Russian would have had to shoot him. But if the Russian shot him, the Jew would have told the truth, so the Russian would have had to stab him with his sword.

YITZIK: Tell me, Yaakov Adler, what was the outcome of this story?

YAAKOV: The Russian stabbed the Jew and then shot him. It does not pay to be too clever.

BARUKH: Is that a true story?

YAAKOV: Yes, but it is from an earlier pogrom. It seemed appropriate for today, however. *(To Yitzik.)* Yitzik Meyer, meet Barukh Goldstein. Reb Goldstein is in charge of charitable relief for the poor of Kishinev. *(The two shake hands.)* Reb Goldstein, how is your wife?

BARUKH: She lost her leg, Yaakov.

YITZIK: *(Bitterly.)* If we made a pile of Jewish limbs that came off this weekend, we could fill the synagogue.

YAAKOV: Do you see why the Zionists send their poets to report on tragedy? What a compelling image, Yitzik!

BARUKH: You must get word to Theodore Herzl, Reb Meyer. You cannot imagine the destruction! Forty-seven killed, 600 injured, 700 houses burned and 2,000 families ruined!

YAAKOV: I have walked through the streets of Kishinev this morning. It is filled with dead horses and burned Torah scrolls.

BARUKH: We do not have the funds to cover this kind of disaster, how could we? Twenty-five million rubles in destruction! Where will we find this kind of money, Reb Meyer?

YAAKOV: Perhaps God will provide, eh? You were a Hasid, Reb Meyer — do you think these are the birth pangs of the Messiah? Is this the moment when things can't get any worse for the Jews?

BARUKH: Do you know, Reb Meyer, that when my wife lost her leg the doctor suggested I go talk to the Rabbi? What good would that do?

YITZIK: Many atheists were made this weekend. Many Jews realized that if they cling to God they cling to their own deaths. What is this?

*(A procession of Hasids enter, led by Lilith, dragging carts filled with corpses wrapped in shrouds. From the other side of the stage a procession of Misnaggedim enter, led by Zalman Bar, likewise carrying their dead.)*

*(They pause when they meet each other, and a cry of rage goes up. The Hasids and Misnaggedim begin to shout at each other, waving their fists.)*

YAAKOV: They must be on their way to the cemetery.

YITZIK: They even battle about who will go first to their graves. I will talk to them.

BARUKH: What?

YAAKOV: What will you tell them?

YITZIK: That there is no God and the only hope for the Jews is the creation of a socialist state in Palestine.

BARUKH: They are angry and grieving, Reb Meyer.

DOVID: This may not be the best time.

YAAKOV: *(Excited.)* Do you think you can convince them?

YITZIK: I am convinced, and I was once just like them. I was a Hasid.

YAAKOV: But I've heard you were not a very good Hasid. I heard the Maid of Kishinev used to beat you every day.

YITZIK: Yes. I wonder if she'll remember me.

*(Yitzik crosses to the procession, leaps atop a cart. He produces a whistle and begins to blow it, attracting the crowd's attention.)*

YITZIK: Listen to me, you Jews! (*Blows whistle.*) Listen to me! (*Blows whistle, the crowd quiets.*) Listen!

ZALMAN BAR: Come down from there!

YITZIK: What are you waiting for, you Jews? The Messiah to come and lead us all to Jerusalem? I tell you this: The Messiah will not come, and these Jewish dead will never rise again!

ZALMAN BAR: How dare you?

YITZIK: I dare because it is the truth! The Messiah will not come, and things will get worse for the Jews. This death and destruction has just begun!

ZALMAN BAR: The Messiah will come. God will not abandon the Jews. God stands with us.

YITZIK: Zalman Bar, God stands with nobody, because there is no God!

(*Angry shouts go up from the crowd.*)

DOVID: I can't bear to watch this!

BARUKH: They will kill him.

YAAKOV: I think he's doing rather well.

YITZIK: (*Pulling out his pocketwatch.*) I will prove to you that there is no God. I defy Him to strike me dead in the next minute. If He does, God exists; if at the end of one minute I am still alive, it will prove my point. There is no God! (*Yitzik looks at his watch, counting the seconds.*) Ten seconds. Twenty. Thirty! Forty. Fifty! (*He snaps his watch shut.*) I win, there is no God! (*He gestures wildly.*) Hold your hands up before your eyes, you Jews, and look at them! This is your Messiah! This is our return to Palestine! It is what we can build with our own hands, and we cannot rely on superstition to do this for us! Where was God this weekend, when we were slaughtered like lambs? Where will He be when the next pogrom comes and more of us die? How do you answer that, Zalman Bar? (*Pointing to Lilith.*) How do you answer that, wife of the Rebbeh, Maid of Kishinev.

LILITH: (*To Shaina.*) Hand me my horsewhip. (*Shaina does so. Lilith marches toward Yitzik, raising the whip.*) Yitzik Meyer, God does not need to strike you dead when he has placed this whip in my hand!

(*Lilith strikes at Yitzik brutally, knocking him off the cart. She stands above him and continues to whip him and he scrambles to get away.*)

LILITH: Do you think God is a lapdog, to jump at your command. When God chooses to strike you dead, Yitzik Meyer, He will not hold back His hand! (*She spits at him.*) You would have the Holy Land rebuilt by unbelievers and founded on sacrilege? I tell you this: I would rather have every Jew here dead than see that happen!

*(Lilith turns on her heels, returns to her procession. Zalman Bar watches her for a moment, then raises his hands.)*

ZALMAN BAR: Misnaggedim, let the Hasids pass!

*(The procession of Misnaggedim move backward, clearing a gap for the Hasids and their carts of dead bodies.)*

ZALMAN BAR: Go bury your dead, Maid of Kishinev.

*(The Hasidim exit, and then the Misnaggedim. Yaakov crosses to Yitzik, helps him up.)*

YAAKOV: It seems the Maid of Kishinev recognized you, Reb Meyer.

YITZIK: The fools! Are they that stupid? Are they that deaf?

YAAKOV: You convinced me. The trick with the pocketwatch is very impressive.

*(The Zionists leave, and the stage is bare for a moment. Suddenly Lilith returns to the stage, screaming in terror, pursued by Reb Yossele and Shaina Roise. Lilith collapses, and the two hurry to her side.)*

SHAINA: Lilith! What is it, Lilith?

LILITH: The cemetery!

SHAINA: What about the cemetery?

LILITH: It's too much to bear! It's too much to bear! *(She grasps at Reb Yossele.)* Reb Yossele, you must make plans!

REB YOSSELE: Plans?

LILITH: Sell the vineyards! Sell the Rebbah's belongings!

REB YOSSELE: Sell it all?

LILITH: Tell the Hasids to sell everything they don't need! Take the money and book us passage — we are leaving Kishinev! *(She stands upright, screaming at something unseen offstage.)* WE ARE LEAVING KISHINEV! YOU WILL NOT HAVE US! YOU WILL NOT HAVE US!

*(Lilith flees the stage, pursued by Reb Yossele and Shaina Roise.)*



## Act Two — Scene Five

*(Reb Yossele and Shaina Rosie sits in chairs, Lilith lies in a bed, all three are obviously older. On one side of the stage sits Lilith's prayer box. A knock comes at the door, and Reb Yossele rises to answer it. It is Yitzik Meyer.)*

REB YOSSELE: Yes?

YITZIK: I've come to see the Maid of Kishinev.

REB YOSSELE: She is not taking visitors, Yitzik Meyer.

YITZIK: You remember me?

REB YOSSELE: I remember all of the Rebbeh's Hasidim.

YITZIK: I have heard Lilith is sick.

REB YOSSELE: She is very weak, Yitzik. She will not be with us much longer.

YITZIK: That is what I have heard. I would like to see her, Reb Yossele, It is a mitzvah.

REB YOSSELE: *(Laughs.)* So now the atheist speaks of mitzvahs! All right, Yitzik, you may see her, but she will not speak to you.

YITZIK: Why not?

REB YOSSELE: The Maid of Kishinev has not spoken in 15 years.

*(Yitzik enters, crosses to Lilith. He looks at her for a moment, and then back at Reb Yossele.)*

YITZIK: She's weeping.

REB YOSSELE: She weeps continuously.

SHAINA: We do not know why. She has wept since we left Kishinev and came to New York. She has not spoken in all that time.

YITZIK: *(Producing a handkerchief and wiping Lilith's face.)* Then it's all true. Do you know that people talk about you, Lilith? They call you "The Weeping Hasid," and they say you never speak and never leave your house. I live one mile from here, did you know that? For the last 15 years I have lived as close to you as I did when we were children. Every day I hear stories about you. You used to be famous because of the things you said, and now you're famous because you will not say anything at all. Tell me, Lilith — have you even seen New York?

SHAINA: She has not left her house since we moved here. Reb Yossele and I care for her.

YITZIK: What does she do all day?

SHAINA: *(Gesturing to the box.)* Prays. Until she got sick.

YITZIK: Prays. For what, I wonder? *(He turns to go.)* I won't stay longer. The Maid of Kishinev must be tired.

LILITH: *(Grasping his sleeve, whispering.)* Wait.

*(Yitzik turns, amazed. Reb Yossele and Shaina look at each other, eyes wide.)*

YITZIK: Lilith? Did you say something?

LILITH: Wait, Yitzik Meyer. I must tell you something. *(Lilith rises, painfully, then gestures to Reb Yossele and Shaina.)* Leave us. I must speak in private.

*(Reb Yossele and Shaina exits, and Lilith gestures toward a chair. Yitzik sits, dumbfounded.)*

YITZIK: I must admit I'm amazed Lilith; what could you have to tell me that you have told nobody for 15 years?

LILITH: I must tell you what I saw in Kishinev. I must tell you why I left.

YITZIK: What did you see?

LILITH: At the graveyard, I saw the graves overflowing with dead Jews. There were thousands, Yitzik, all naked, all piled on top of each other.

YITZIK: Thousands? But it was 47 people that died in the pogrom.

LILITH: These were the bodies of those who had not died yet. I saw the mother of demons leading her children to the graveyard to feast on the dead. I knew that if my Hasids remained in Kishinev we would all die. Everywhere I looked, I saw the same thing: On the train leaving Kishinev, outside the window, I saw piles of dead Jews. In Prague the streets were filled with corpses. On the boat I looked over the side of the ship and I saw them — thousands of bloated bodies bobbing on the surface of the ocean. I see them to this day. I know what I see, Yitzik; it is a prophetic dream. Millions will die, Yitzik. All the Jews of Europe.

YITZIK: What? All the Jews of Europe? This is what you see, all the Jews of Europe — dead?

LILITH: I pray to God every day that it will not be so. When I moved into this house I had my prayer box moved in. Every day I went into the box and prayed.

*(The box, unnoticed, begins to shake and the noise of somebody WAILING inside emerges.)*

YITZIK: You're a Hasid, Lilith. You must believe that God hears your prayers.

LILITH: You don't believe.

YITZIK: No.

LILITH: God hears, Yitzik. Sometimes He turns His back. I know this. I have had a vision. I dreamed my father came to me one night, when I was in prayer.

*(Reb Kitzis enters, crosses to the prayer box. His arms are painted with elaborate Hebrew calligraphy.)*

LILITH: It was my own dead father, Yitzik! There in my house!

*(The prayer box opens and Lilith (age 7) emerges. Reb Kitzis squeezes her shoulder.)*

REB KITZIS: Don't be frightened, daughter. I must show you something.

LILITH: In my dream, I was back in Kishinev, and I was a child again. And my father pointed, and across from me was a very old man.

*(Reb Kitzis points, and an ANCIENT JEW appears.)*

REB KITZIS: Speak to this man, Lilith. He will ask you how things are with the Jews, and you must answer him truthfully. Do you understand me, Lilith?

LILITH (AGE 7): Yes, tate. *(She crosses the room to the ancient Jew. He extends his arms to her, and she embraces him.)*

ANCIENT JEW: So, daughter of Zion, you have come a long way to see me?

LILITH (AGE 7): Yes.

ANCIENT JEW: And you have something to tell me?

LILITH: Yes.

ANCIENT JEW: Tell me how things go with the Jews.

LILITH (AGE 7): I have terrible dreams.

ANCIENT JEWS: What do you dream?

LILITH (AGE 7): I dream of death. I dream all the Jews in Europe will die.

ANCIENT JEW: *(Shaking head.)* Oh, daughter of Zion, I cannot tell you how much I did not want to hear those words!

LILITH (AGE 7): But God must help.

ANCIENT JEW: He will not. God will turn his back.

LILITH: *(Weeping.)* How can God turn His back? How can He ignore the suffering of the Jews?

ANCIENT JEW: He does not ignore it, daughter of Zion. Although His back is turned, He weeps.

LILITH (AGE 7): But there must be something you can do!

ANCIENT JEW: There is nothing. God turns his back, now I must. *(He turns, weeping.)* Please leave me.

LILITH: I won't!

ANCIENT JEW: Leave! My heart is broken! I wish you had told me something else; I wish you had told me God looks after my children!

*(Lilith (age 7) turns, crosses to Reb Kitzis. She takes his hand, and they exit.)*

LILITH: *(To Yitzik.)* I have told nobody else this.

YITZIK: Why?

LILITH: I did not tell my Hasids, because they do not need to know such a thing. They are safe. But I knew you would believe me, and perhaps you could help.

YITZIK: Why did you think I would believe you?

LILITH: *(Reaching up to touch his scar.)* Because you have also seen the face of evil. You have also seen the mother of demons. Do you remember telling me that?

YITZIK: Yes. On the day your father died.

LILITH: Was it true?

YITZIK: Yes, I have seen the face of evil. When I was a boy my family was murdered. Their killers cut my face. While they were cutting me, I looked out the window and saw evil looking back at me.

LILITH: So you must believe what I tell you!

YITZIK: Do you know whose face I saw at the window? It was the face of a neighboring non-Jewish woman. I knew her my entire childhood; she took care of me when I was a baby and she was friends with my parents. But she looked in the window and saw my parents murdered, and saw my face cut, and she turned away. This is the face of evil. This is the mother of demons that I saw. Perhaps, Lilith, there is no truth in your visions.

LILITH: I pray you are right. We cannot know God's will, and I will not live to see it. *(Lilith sobs, covering her face with her hands.)* If you believed in God, Yitzik, would you believe that He is merciful?

YITZIK: Yes.

**LILITH:** I will die soon, Yitzik. I will not live to see my visions come true — this is God's mercy. (*She clutches at him.*) There is a God, Yitzik, and this is His mercy.

(*End.*)